

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 13, 2014

Chairman Tom Wheeler
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

We are writing in a bipartisan manner to urge swift action to modernize the E-Rate program in order to deliver sufficient broadband to every school, classroom, and library.

Taking advantage of cutting-edge technologies to improve the way educators teach and students learn has always been a widely-supported endeavor, as has the E-Rate program itself. However, it's now time that we give E-Rate an upgrade – and modernize this successful 18-year-old program for the broadband era.

While broadband is poised to unlock digital learning's potential, too many of our children are left trying to access the tools of tomorrow using the Internet speeds of the past. The typical K-12 school has about the same Internet access speed as the average home –only with 200 times more users. This means that 40 million students are being left behind without the speeds they need to take full advantage of digital learning opportunities.

High-speed broadband can help us better educate, better innovate, and better compete in the world. It can help us prepare our kids for the jobs of the future and provide our current workforce with skills needed to succeed today. Broadband also fosters a domestic educational technology industry that creates new jobs, and helps the nation become more competitive on the world stage. In fact, a poll released by the bipartisan LEAD Commission found that over 80 percent of Americans are very concerned about the lack of basic technology access in the classroom, and 6 in 10 believe allowing educators to incorporate technology to teach students the skills needed for 21st century jobs is a very important reason to expand high-speed broadband access.

To bring our students up to speed, it's clear we need to keep pace with the growing potential of today's digital learning technologies. That is why we believe it's imperative that the Commission acts expeditiously to modernize, expand, and strengthen the successful E-Rate program by:

- 1) Simplifying the application process, while increasing transparency and accountability and helping improve efficiency.
- 2) Focusing the E-Rate program on broadband infrastructure to help ensure that we maximize the impact of the E-Rate on connectivity to support student learning for all.
- 3) Investing in upgrades that enable every school and library to benefit from high speed broadband options that allow these institutions, rural, urban and suburban, to meet the connectivity goals that their kids need.

By modernizing and strengthening the E-Rate program, we can help empower all students to continually benefit from the latest technological innovations not just for the next semester, or next school year, but for the next generation of learners.

Extending high-speed access to our schools and libraries is more than just an education issue. It impacts our communities, our businesses, and the competitiveness of our nation. In an era when more and more jobs require you to be wired to get hired, let's ensure that every child has the skills needed for the knowledge economy. To bring about this brighter future, we ask you to take swift action to update and expand the E-Rate program to bring high-speed broadband and transformative learning opportunities to every school and library in America.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Johnny Isakson
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

cc:

Commissioner Clyburn
Commissioner O'Rielly
Commissioner Rosenworcel
Commissioner Pai